

Have You Heard of Virginia Pine?

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Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*), common in the Piedmont, grows best in full sun and can grow in eroded, poor, dry soils, and well-drained clay soils. Deer resistance and moderate pollution tolerance add to its success. Virginia pine is an early succession species. Ecological succession is a natural process that occurs after a disturbance, either naturally occurring or caused by human activity. Succession will also occur over time in abandoned fields. Plant species that need sun are the first to appear. The plant community changes over time as conditions change, and so do the critters that live there.

Virginia pine was once thought of as a forest weed, but, as with all native species, it has ecological benefits. As a successional species it prevents erosion in bare areas, and it helps make way for other plant species. Its seeds are a food source for many birds, woodpeckers use older trees as a nesting site, and it provides good cover for wildlife. Virginia pine is also a host plant for the larvae of the Imperial moth (*Eacles imperialis*). For us humans, the wood is used to make paper products, and the species is sometimes grown as a Christmas tree. However, it requires a lot of shearing to create a conical shape. Virginia pine may also be planted to revegetate lands after strip mining and clear cutting.

Virginia pine grows in Forest Hill Park, but not deep in forested areas. This photo shows young trees growing near the service road on the east side of the park. This sloped site used to be mowed and had a lot of erosion. It has poor, dry and rocky soil, yet it is becoming revegetated with successional species. The largest Virginia pine here must be more than 5 years old, since it has had cones for several years now. Several younger trees are growing nearby and probably sprouted from the seed of the largest tree.



Identifying Virginia pine:

A close look at needles and cones reveals clues to identify this species of pine.

- · Needles come in bundles of two; needles are 1 1/2 to 3 inches long and twisted.
- · Cones are small and egg shaped, with a very sharp prickle on each scale. Cones stay on the tree for years after the seeds are released.



Identifying other species of pine:

- · Needles occur in bundles of three, four or five, with needles up to 9 inches long and not twisted.
- · Cones may be larger and have different shapes. Some have prickles at the tip of each scale and some have a long stalk.



Left to right:

- Loblolly pine - 3 needles per bundle
- White pine - 5 needles per bundle
- Virginia pine - 2 twisted needles per bundle



Left to right

- Virginia pine - small and egg shaped, with a very sharp prickle at the tip of each scale. (see prickles on other image)
- Loblolly pine - larger with a prickle at the tip of each scale.
- White pine - long and skinny compared to others, no prickles, map have white, sticky sap. Note the stalk at the top.

What does the future hold for these trees in the park? Assuming the area is not drastically impacted by humans and that invasive species continue to be managed, succession will move forward. Hopefully these trees will live a long life of 70-90 years. They will likely become mixed with other tree species such as loblolly pine, black cherry, and yellow poplar, and with some shrubs. The plant community will continue to change, as will the critters that live and feed there. As the hardwoods (oaks, hickories and other species) grow larger and cast more shade, the pines will gradually diminish. The old ones will die out, but other sites will have sunny, open spaces for new pines to emerge and thrive.

Other pines native to this area:

- Shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) - May be confused with Virginia pine. Cones are similar. Needles in bundles of 2 or 3 and have a slight twist. A close look at bark and needles may be needed to distinguish the two. Found occasionally in the park.
- Loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) - Very common in the park.
- White pine (*Pinus strobus*) - Possibly in the park?
- Pond pine (*Pinus serotina*) - Needles in bundles of 3 or 4. This pine is found on wet sites; other native pines are found on drier sites.

Friends of Forest Hill Park is hosting a tree walk on April 5. If you are interested in attending, visit our Facebook page or <http://www.friendsofforesthillpark.org/events.html>

Welcome, welcome, little stranger,
Fear no harm, and fear no danger;
We are glad to see you here,
For you sing "Sweet Spring is near."

~Louisa May Alcott, "To The First Robin," 1840



A message from our president, Chris Catanzaro:

Have you seen the plastic ground cover near the Stone House and wondered what's going on? In a joint effort with [Richmond VA Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities](#) we're preparing the site for a native plant pollinator garden! [Friends of Forest Hill Park](#) will be purchasing and installing all of the plants. If you would like to learn more, donate to help us find more pollinator gardens or volunteer to help us, please reach out or sign up for an upcoming event.



On January 25th, we had 39 participants in our habitat restoration work event, including 26 enlisted men and women from Ft. Gregg-Adams (Go Army!) and three FFHP board members. Thanks to the Parks staff for cleaning up our mess and helping with invasive removal. Parks hauled off a whole truckload of invasive plants removed from the east side of the park along the service road down to the lake.



Park Fun, Victorian Style

When Forest Hill Park first opened, some popular outdoor activities were croquet, archery and volleyball. Fresh air activities and sunshine honed appetites, making picnics essential.



For a Picnic Luncheon.
For a picnic luncheon there should be plenty of relishes and few sweets. Many people object to meat sandwiches, and if the party is to start early in the morning the bread, biscuit or rolls are better carried uncut. The butter should be taken in a tightly covered tin box, which should be wrapped in several layers of wet cloth, and this put into the centre of a much larger box and packed tightly with wads of paper, so that it will not come in direct contact with the sides of the outer box. This will prevent the heat from hands or sun reaching it. Brown bread is always especially delicious after a long walk, and it is well to have loaves of both it and white bread.



Stuffed tomatoes are also easily carried. It is better not to skin them, lest they crush. Wash and dry them, cut a thin slice from the top, chop the pulp without removing it, leaving a good thick wall. Add two or three drops of onion juice to each, a teaspoonful of mayonnaise dressing and one-half teaspoonful of chopped parsley. Salt and pepper to taste, and add a chopped olive if it is wanted. Place the cover on each tomato, pack closely in a box, and carry it right side up.